

Patient perspectives on barriers and enablers to a treatment for all approach for hepatitis B

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Background: Major gaps exist in diagnosis, linkage to and maintenance in hepatitis B care in Australia and globally. To meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2030 viral hepatitis elimination targets, access to and engagement in clinical care needs to be increased. Under current Australian treatment guidelines, not all people with hepatitis B are eligible for antiviral treatment. Recently, updated WHO treatment guidelines vastly expanded treatment eligibility, with all people with hepatitis B being provided the opportunity to access treatment, including from the point of diagnosis. This qualitative study explored patient perceptions of hepatitis B treatment and opinions on this "treatment for all approach".

Methods: 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with patients from a metropolitan gastroenterology clinic in Melbourne, Australia. Of the interviewed participants, 13 were female and 10 were male, and 21 patients were born in countries other than Australia (the most common country of birth being Vietnam) and 2 were born in Australia. Participants were aged between 33 and 69 years. Interview data were thematically analysed.

Results: 13 were open to a "treatment for all approach", 8 were not, and 2 were unsure. Enablers included: 1) perceived seriousness of hepatitis B and its complications, 2) belief in medications, 3) belief in benefits of early intervention, 4) receiving support through the treatment experience, and 5) trust in medical professionals. Barriers included: 1) psychological impact related to long-term medication, 2) perceived culture of overmedicalisation, 3) belief that the medication is unnecessary, and 4) cost and logistics associated with prescription medication.

Conclusion: A key enabler identified was of psychological support for patients throughout treatment decision making. Given that cure for hepatitis B is a future possibility, exploring the acceptability of a treatment for all approach and patient considerations for treatment is crucial preparatory work to determine acceptability of treatment.

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